



DATE: Dec. 24, 2007

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San Manuel Area Officially Designated as Meeting Federal Clean Air Requirement for Sulfur Dioxide

PHOENIX (Dec. 24, 2007) – Arizona Department of Environmental Quality Director Steve Owens announced today that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has officially determined that the San Manuel area in Pinal County northeast of Tucson has met federal health standard for sulfur dioxide and has re-designated the area as being in “attainment” with the standard.

“This is great news for the San Manuel area,” Director Owens said. “It’s important to recognize the real progress that has been made in improving air quality in rural Arizona.”

The San Manuel area had been designated as being nonattainment for sulfur dioxide in 1979 because of emissions from the BHP copper smelter, which operated for many years. The smelter was closed in 1999 and was dismantled earlier this year by BHP. The San Manuel area had not recorded any exceedances for sulfur dioxide since 1985.

Owens said that since becoming ADEQ Director in January 2003, he has made it a top priority to get EPA to officially redesignate areas in Arizona as being in attainment with federal air quality requirements.

“We are committed to getting communities out from under the stigma of non-attainment wherever we can,” Owens said. Since Owens has been ADEQ Director, a number of areas in Arizona in addition to San Manuel, have been redesignated by EPA as being in attainment. Earlier this year, the Miami area in Gila County was redesignated as being in attainment with the sulfur dioxide standard. The Douglas area was redesignated as attainment for sulfur dioxide in 2006, as was the Morenci area of Greenlee County in 2004.

The Ajo area of Pima County was found to be in compliance with the federal air quality standard for coarse particulate matter (known as PM10) in 2006 and in compliance for sulfur dioxide emissions in 2004.

The Phoenix area attained the federal 1-hour health standard for ozone in 2005 and the federal health standard for carbon monoxide in 2004.